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Developing a Child Study for the Young Teenager

by

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There are three principles we need to follow when we conduct a child study in the high school faculty meeting. The first is: right speech. When I speak in a faculty meeting, is it to be really helpful or is it only to hear myself speak? The second is: right listening. This is the way to find the archai in our gatherings, for this requires active listening. You know if you listen passively you soon get very tired. Active listening, without saying a word but rather being totally in the process, will make you—others in the room, too—feel enlivened. The third is: right quietness. Everyone can feel when someone in the room is inwardly active and yet filled with quietness. I have known colleagues who seldom said a word, but if for some reason they were absent from the meeting, we felt very uncomfortable because they had been really bearing the process of our work. These are the principles that build a child study.

During this conference, some of us have been working in a seminar with different aspects of the child study. To my mind there is no other system for a child study than the child itself. This means that the way a child study will unfold depends on the student you are talking about.

I do not think of a student as an airplane. When you enter an airplane you see the pilots and also the ladies working their check lists. It is so impressive—all these long lists: check, check, check, and now all is OK, you hope. Now sometimes there are teachers who think a child should be treated like an airplane, and so they prepare checklists for the child study: one chin (check), two ears (check) I do not think this really works. What does work are principles of development: of imagination, inspiration, and intuition. A child study for all children—from kindergarten right to up to high school—will pass through these principles of development. Try in 20 minutes to

experience this development from imagination to inspiration and intuition. You can start by asking about the history of the child so that you know from where it comes. But the three principles should not be forgotten.

At the start of a child study in the faculty, it is important that every member of the faculty be present. It is silly to think that a child study will be better with only those teachers who know this child. Experience shows that sometimes the best questions come from colleagues who don't know the student at all. One technical point: if the student has a mentor, he or she should not lead this child study. The study should be facilitated by someone who is not so intimately engaged with the student. The mentor can offer the first part—the imagination—for this is the easiest part. In this initial phase we are very safe because we are sharing what we know and we are describing the student in space and in time. This is not so difficult. Basically you are describing how he appears in space—his build (tall, not so tall, and so on). The same applies to the description of his relation to time, his "time picture." We can call this the child's biography, including all that is related to his health—when the child was hospitalized with a broken leg and all of the other interesting things and problems the child has experienced. The mentor describes these details, and now during this description the most interesting —yet unspoken—things are happening within the faculty. All of the other teachers in the room are balancing with their own inner processes all that the mentor is saying. They are weighing all the phenomena that the mentor is describing, but they are weighing them as symptoms.

This jump from phenomena to symptom is akin to the leap from imagination to inspiration. This is not an intellectual process; it is a process arising from the weighing, the judging of the heart—what Rudolf Steiner calls Michaelic thinking. Michaelic thinking occurs when our hearts start to think. This is the way from perception/imagination to inspiration. During the description we are all listening, making judgments about the phenomena as symptoms. Twenty minutes is quite enough. It is not necessary to know everything about a child or a student, though we may notice how often the teachers love to stay here for days in the first phase—they might even suggest it is better to spend three meetings just on one child, for after all in this first phase you are the safest, you are dealing with what you know, rather than with what you don't. We all feel uncomfortable when we move from description of the outer situation to the second phase where we have to try to understand the real being of the student—this is not so safe. Still, this second step is so important because it awakens our inspirations. If you feel certain in this second step, be careful—for you run the risk of transplanting the outer into the inner. Try instead to detect what is going on. Are we seeing a case of forces of Venus that are too strong in relation to the forces of Mars in a gifted 16-year-old girl who has suddenly lost interest in mathematics? All of her many wonderful questions have dried up and she is no longer interested in math and her teacher is getting frustrated. Are we dealing with a problem of the ego's changing relation to the astral? Tread carefully, for even though we all try to understand, nobody knows.

A child study at the time of Rudolf Steiner took between one and one-and-a-half minutes. He had usually seen the child, he now listened to the teacher and then said this, that, and the other. Who is next? He could do this in 90 seconds because he knew. For us it is more a question of trial and error, so we need to be aware. For us a child study is simultaneously a learning and a social process, and you can enrich the life of the faculty if you create a space in which to say things you are not sure about. In any case, one can never say of someone else's observation, "That is not true!" Rather, if I say something and the facilitator does not agree with this observation and someone else offers a quite different observation, then there begins to emerge in me a wonderful new capacity of being able to take seriously what my colleague thinks and not what I thought. This sounds so

simple, but try it! This is all part of forming inwardly the balance between phenomena and symptoms. We are undertaking a new search for balance—an unspoken balance—but that is the real work of the child study: unspoken balance.

In the second phase I now ask, "Do I feel the evidence of what my colleague is saying?" How is it possible that suddenly this girl's power of interest went quiet? I can entertain the thought that the ego organization has lost interest in her soul life, in the higher parts of her soul life, but if so, why? Nobody knows. We try to take seriously what the colleague is saying and at the same time inwardly we ask ourselves, "Do we feel the evidence?" If as a group we do not have a feeling for the evidence you will detect that the process of discovery and insight soon begins to decline, and the discussion leader will ask someone else for ideas. Though we speak of moving in the realm of thoughts, we are in fact totally in the realm of feelings—inspiration is organized feeling. For the most part our feelings are not organized, but in the realm of inspiration our feelings become organized and we can take them as seriously as we normally do our thoughts.

It can happen in this second phase of the child study that we do not find the right evidence and then an experienced faculty member will say we have to try again next week. This can happen. But let us say that the faculty did have a feeling for the evidence in the case of the girl who suddenly lost interest in math and so we come to the third phase. Now, if one feels uncomfortable moving from the first phase to the second, you can expect it will be all the more uncomfortable to go to the third step because we must now find a way to help; therapy means to help. But how? Can we find something that will offer a different possibility of will forces; that is, can we organize our will forces in such a way that we can be helpful? This is no longer a process of listening or hearing but a process of engagement. I have to engage myself—that is will in the will—and then we try to find how we can help her. That is intuition, the third step. The basic element of intuition is engagement. Perhaps one colleague says, "I will give her some biographies to read, maybe that will re-enforce her Mars forces in the realm of Venus—maybe." Or another says, "Let's have a blood test for hemoglobin."

Now there is a problem today. We think that for every problem we have an expert. Rudolf Steiner often said that the study of the human being is a task for all humanity. That was Rudolf Steiner's deepest wish. This is especially the case in these times when the world is turned upside down with the result that we feed students Ritalin instead of good education. Rudolf Steiner says education is a higher transformation of the work of the medical doctor. Don't take any short cuts to healing. Education can work as a healing but the process is different.

A final phase in the child study is as important as the three—imagination, inspiration, intuition—I have tried to characterize this morning. After 2-3 months, when we have done everything for a child study, we stop and look back. Have we done what we proposed? Has it worked? We often think a child study is so cosmic that we don't need feedback, but we absolutely need this feedback. Have we done what we proposed? Do we honestly walk the talk? Maybe nothing worked for this girl and we see that we did a bad job, but it may also be that she is totally changed. You can experience both results.

* Members of the Waldorf High School Project core group have edited this article and the speaker has reviewed it, however, it is considered to be in draft format lacking a complete edit. It is provided so that AWSNA schools can make use of the content.

— David Mitchell
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